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## British traditionalism and Russian attitude to traditions

Final Project

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Moscow 2017

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**Introduction**

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Traditions are the national memory of the people, something that distinguishes them from others, keep them from depersonalization and allow them to feel the connection of generations and their own history, to get spiritual and life support. Unlike laws and rules, which we have to observe for our safety or well-being, **traditions are usually things we do by choice because they are customary and meaningful.** Most traditions are enjoyable things that help people to observe an occasion or feel unified with a certain group, such as their religion, team, or fellow citizens.

Most traditions are now inseparable parts of everyday life, or simply common social etiquette, though sometimes they have their origins in superstition. The awareness of them and their perceived importance depends on various factors including region and age. Some are extremely common and practiced by the vast majority of the population, while some are extremely obscure.

The aim of this project is to describe the traditions of two countries – Great Britain and Russia, their origins, the attitude to the traditionalism in both countries, the similarities and the differences. Some of these traditions are reasonable; others are curious, sometimes funny, and they often are maintained simply as a tourist attraction.

There are many traditions associated with some historical facts, state ceremonies, university life, food, clothing and popular holidays. Others are connected with the mode of everyday life. They deal with customs, manners of behaviour and habits of the people. Studying them will help us to understand they way of life in Great Britain and Russia.

**British traditionalism**

British people prefer holding on to old traditions. They’re not really interested in adapting to the modern society like other European countries are doing. Driving on the left side and judges who are wearing old-fashioned white wigs in court are examples of British traditionalism.  
The reason that traditionalism is so important to Britons could be that during their colony period, they were giving away their culture to countries around the world instead of getting influenced by other cultures. By living on an island with colonies in different continents, excluding Europe, European culture didn’t infect Britain.

**Britain 'one of the most traditional countries in the world'**, research of IPSOS Global suggests. Britain appears to value traditions higher than most nations, with 80 per cent saying they are important - the third highest proportion.The findings emerged in a survey, described as the largest of its kind, of more than 16,000 participants in 20 countries, including the UK.

Asked whether traditions are an important part of society, China (90 per cent), Russia (82 per cent) and Britain (80 per cent) rated it most important in the survey by Ipsos Global.

**Religious and holiday traditions**

 

One of the most important parts of Traditionalism in Britain is the **National day**. England`s national day is on the 23th of April it's called St. Georges day.  Why has st. George got anything to do with the national day? The legend of George slaying a fearsome fire-breathing dragon and rescuing an innocent maiden from death. The shield he used was a red-cross that now is the English flag. England doesn`t have a national uniform, but they do have national emblem. The emblem is a red rose, the civil wars (1455-1485) between the royal house of Lancaster (red rose) and the royal house of York (white rose), it is still unclear why it is red rose and not white rose.

**Pancake Day** is the popular name for the Shrove Tuesday. In the middle ages people on that day made merry and ate pancakes. The most common form of celebrating this day in the old times was the all town ball game or tug-of-war, in which everyone was tearing here and there, trying to get the ball or rope into their part of the city. Today the only custom that is observed throughout Britain is pancake-eating.

**Easter** is one of the most important holidays in Christianity. In England it’s a time for giving and receiving presents, mostly Easter eggs. We can say that the egg is the most popular emblem of Easter, but spring-time flowers are also used to stress the nature’s awakening. Nowadays there are a lot of chocolate Easter eggs, having some small gifts inside. But a real hard-boiled egg, decorated and painted in bright colours, still appears on breakfast tables on Ester Day, or it’s hidden in the house or garden for children to finny. Egg-rolling is a traditional Easter pastime. You roll the eggs down a clope until they are cracked and broken, after they are eaten up. **Bonfire Night (Guy Fawkes Day**) - November 5. This day is in celebration of the failed gunpowder attempt to blow up the house of Parliament in 1605. It is celebrated with fireworks at night. Many families will make effigies of Guy Fawkes and burn them in a bon fire either in their own back yards or with other members of the community. Since the day is so close to **Halloween**, many will combine the two holidays (maybe that is why there are so many Guy Fawkes masks available).

**Class Consciousness and Royal family**



The feudal system, introduced by the Normans, has stayed on in British society. The feudal system consists of three main classes: The upper class, consisting of monarchs, lords and ladies, the middle class were people with more than basic education is placed, and the working class for people employed in trade and industry. We can see the class system when it comes to education. Children with parents of the middle and upper classes are sent to independent schools, while children with parents in the working class are sent to private schools. Some people want to climb the social ladder to a higher class, while others want to remain in the class they’ve been born into.

Although definitions of social class in the United Kingdom today vary and are highly controversial, most are influenced by factors of wealth, occupation and education. Until recently the Parliament of The United Kingdom was organized on a class basis, with the House of Lords representing the hereditary upper class and the House of Commons representing everyone else. **The British monarch** is usually viewed as being at the top of the social class structure.

Royal family is another curious topic. While nearly all European royal families are just a history, British royal family still exists, and the Queen is one of the most famous persons all over the world. Though Queen doesn’t have all the authority and state power that other queens used to have, still British people think that royal family is an important part of their country. Moreover, Queen’s birthday is widely celebrated in UK, New Zealand and Australia, let’s say even two birthdays. The **Queen** celebrates two birthdays each year: her actual birthday on 21 April and her official birthday on (usually) the second Saturday in June. The British monarch’s birthday celebrations have often been held on a day that is not their actual birthday. The tradition is linked to the unreliable British weather because the Royal family wants to hold the grand royal birthday parade in the summer.

This is another evidence of British traditionalism. British people are not keen to changing things around them and traditions even if some traditions have no sense in the 21th century.

**Russian traditionalism**

Many people in Russia, especially in big cities, have been greatly influenced by globalization. The attitude of Russian people to traditionalism is complex. On the one hand Russian people usually are open to the new. On the other hand long-standing traditions are still of vital importance in Russia. IPSOS Global did a survey among 20 countries (more than 16000 participants). Asked whether traditions are an important part of society, 82 per cent of Russians answered – “yes”.

Many of Russian traditions are truly unique and have their roots in paganism. Other traditions are closely connected with religion: Orthodoxy (the most wide-spread religion in Russia), Islam, Buddhism and other religions.

**Religious and holiday traditions**

Many Russians are religious people. When a new baby is born in Russia he/she is usually christened in a church. **Christening** is an ancient ceremony during which a new baby is dipped 3 times into the water. After a baby has been christened, Russians usually say: “He/she is a man of God”. It’s common to invite relatives and guests after this ceremony and to have a festive dinner.

In Russia pagan superstitions and Orthodox beliefs have entwined in a very peculiar way. However, the acquisition of a new religion is a two-way process. Like any other religion, Orthodoxy did not reject pagan traditions followed by ancient Russians, but rather absorbed its features.



Even in the time of the ancient pagan deity Ancient Russians used to have **Kupalo**, the God of summer fertility. In his honor people of sang songs and jumped over the bonfire. This ritual act has become an annual traditional celebration of summer solstice, combining a pagan and Christian traditions.

Perhaps the most cheerful holiday in Russia is the Pancake week (Shrovetide). This holiday is also considered to come from pre-Christian times, when the Slavs were still pagans. In the old days **Maslenitsa** was for remembrance of the dead. So the burning of the figure of Maslenitsa means her funeral, and blini (pancakes) – coliphia. But with time the Russians longing for fun and entertainment turned the sad holiday into jolly Maslenitsa with blini - round, yellow and hot as the sun, sledding and horse sleigh riding.

**Easter** is the day of the resurrection of Christ. The holiday came to Russia from Byzantium together with Russia’s christening in the end of the 10th century. Since then, this Christian holiday has been widely celebrated all over Russia. The day before Easter all churches hold night services. By that time, kulich, the traditional holiday baking symbolizing the body of Christ had been already baked and Easter eggs painted. The common phrase you can hear on that day is: "Khristos voskres!" (Christ is risen!), which is to be followed by "Voistinu voskres" (Truly He is risen!).

**Christmas** is the holiday of the birth of Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church observes Christmas according to the Julian Calendar, on January 7, while Western churches celebrate it on December 25, in accordance with the Gregorian Calendar.

**Old New Year** is celebrated in Russia on the night of January 13. After the Bolsheviks got into power, they replaced all aspects of religion with their new ideology. Christmas celebrations were prohibited and New Year became a major holiday. Paradoxically, Old New Year was still celebrated according to the old calendar of the Russian Church. It was a protest of Russians against the religious war led by the Bolsheviks.

**Bathing in Ice-Hole on Epiphan** in Russia is customary ​​on the night of January 19. It is believed that the water becomes holy on January 19. According to church rules, every Christian before a dip in an ice-hole must come to church service. Swimming in an ice-hole is considered optional. The decision to swim or not every person makes for himself, based on their health. In most Russian cities the places for ice swimming are especially prepared in advance. Traditionally it is believed that dipping in an ice-hole on Epiphany helps cleansing the body and the spirit, relieves of sins. Some people swim in ice-hole to support Russian traditions and become healthier. If you follow the safety rules, then ice swimming can actually be beneficial to your health. Swimming in an ice-hole on Epiphany is dipping in water three times. Christians must submerge while praying. In olden Russia, it was believed that ice swimming got you rid of all diseases. Before dipping you need to warm up your muscles a little. And you typically don’t stay in water for more than a minute.

**Russian sauna**

Russian sauna is famous all over the world. It is a tradition handed down from the past, to promote and keep health. Russian sauna has always been surprising for foreigners. Indeed, imagine that first you are in a hot steam bathroom, then have yourself lashed with an oak or birch besom, sometime later you run outside, and jump into white snow or even dive into an ice-hole. And Russians enjoy all of that!

Russian steam sauna appeared in the 5-6thcenturies. It was popular among all Russian classes. Russian steam sauna was used not only for maintaining health but also as a universal remedy to treat many diseases. In the Middle Ages in Europe there were plague and cholera. But these epidemics were not so widespread in Russia thanks to Russian sauna.

**Welcoming guests**



In Russia dear guests are traditionally welcomed with bread and salt. The guest should break off a piece of bread, dip it in salt and eat. This ritual has become a symbol of communion with the basic life values of the hosts; it also means that the guest has become a friend and is ready “to eat a bushel of salt” with them, i.e. share all their troubles and cares. The expression *khleb-sol’* (bread-salt) in Russia was the generalized name for food and treat. An invitation to *khleb-sol’* (bread-salt) was the formula of inviting to a feast. The old Russian way of wishing “Bon appetit!” (Priyatnogo appetita!) sounded as *Khleb da sol’!* (literally meaning “bread and salt”). This formula was believed to bear a special meaning and have the power of driving away evil spirits and any sort of harm. The custom of bread-and-salt is now rarely observed in daily life, but is performed as a tradition on special occasions, especially Russian weddings.

**Great Brittan vs Russia: similarities and differences in traditions and the attitude to traditions**



Though on the first sight one might think that Great Britain and Russia are quite different and have nothing in common, that’s not actually right.

Firstly, the attitude to the traditions is similar in both countries. The vast majority of population thinks that traditions are important part of the nation. Also there’re many similar traditions and customs in UK and Russia.

**Laughter for no reason is a hallmark of a fool vs. Keep smiling**

The 'keep smiling' manner, manifesting one's permanent good spirits and humorous outlook is at risk of being misunderstood in Russia unlike Great Britain. When first in Russia one might be surprised why there are so few people laughing and smiling in the streets and in public places. One should remember the Russian saying: "Laughter for no good reason is a hallmark of a fool". The affected demonstration of happiness and successfulness might be perceived as a sign of one's tactlessness or hard-heartedness (it is unnatural to be always happy while there are so many grieves in the world, the Russians believe at heart).

**Drinking traditions – similarities and differences**

British people like going out to pubs to have a drink (usually ale) at the weekends. Russian people also like spending time with friends, having fun in the cafes or bars at the weekends. Though Russians prefer vodka, as it’s believed, but the younger generation is used to drinking beer mostly. Meeting many drunken people on Friday and Saturday evenings is common in both countries.

**Conversation traditions - differences**

Unlike Englishmen, the Russians are unable to speak about weather throughout a transatlantic voyage. Boring will be themes of food and drinks and clothes (though everything depends…). Russians are more sociable, a good deal less private, and far less likely to mind their own business. If you’re travelling, people will get talking to you almost instantaneously, will help you with your luggage, will share their food and life stories. They will also ask questions and offer advice that most Brits will feel is of a personal nature. Brits are far more reserved and the concept of private space is very important; the idea of living in a communal apartment (two families sharing and you not even being able to pick your neighbours) would fill a Brit with horror. British people hardly ever tell a stranger about their private life, family or job. In Russia it is customary to speak about lots of things: personal affairs, professional interests and hobbies, talents and achievements of children, health, and any personal or financial problems, novelties of cultural and literary life. Of special interest are themes of philosophy and politics. If you ask a Russian "How are you?" / Kak dela?", you risk to get a complete report on how he/she really is. The formalism of the British people at this point can hardly be understood in Russia. Do not be surprised at the ease with which the Russians discuss their personal life. When in a train, you might hear quite intimate details of your casual fellow passenger's affaires and feelings; if you willingly support the conversation, you will be treated to some personal stories and regales, whichever your companion has at hand.

**Tea-drinking tradition in both countries**

 

Tea-drinking tradition is important both for Great Britain and for Russia.

English tea-drinking tradition has a long history. Tea was brought to Britain in the 17th century. Traditional tea-time in England is at 5 o’clock. But British people drink tea also in the morning or during the day as they believe it’s healthy and refreshing. Tea is drunk with milk usually from China cups. Tea shouldn’t be drunk in a hurry and should be accompanied by friendly conversation.

Tea is also part of Russian culture. Almost 82% Russians drinks tea. An important aspect of the Russian tea culture is Samovar – a symbol of hospitality and comfort. Tea is often drunk with lemon or jam. Traditionally black tea is more common in Russia but green is becoming more and more popular.

**Conclusion**



Despite a wide range of differences in Russian and British customs and traditions, there’re many similarities as well – tea-drinking for example.

Both nations give much importance to traditions. Though we should mention that British people are more conservative, reserved and it can be seen in the way they follow their traditions, many of which have not been changed for centuries.

Russians, on the one hand, value their culture and traditions, consider the traditionalism as a part of the history and national character, on the other hand they are more open-minded and easily adopt the traditions of other countries (e.g. Halloween, Valentine’s Day, some Western wedding traditions).

The globalization anyway takes a toll on every nation and even British people especially younger generation tend to be less tied to traditions.

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